

Marching Through Georgia

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Summary: McGarrett flashes back to his Midshipman days and a firstie who tormented him.

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****Teresa L. Conaway****

Steve McGarrett realized how tired he was as soon as he sank into the plush first-class seat. He usually flew coach, but someone else had bought the ticket this time. He could hear the commotion in back as tourists settled in, and he was glad to be up front with the road-weary businessmen for a change.

He half-listened as an attractive stewardess went through her routine. She did her best to stir up interest in the emergency exits and oxygen masks. He liked her smile, her hair, her voice; he wondered whether she was based in Honolulu.

An hour earlier he, Danny, and Chin Ho had been in a heated shoot-out with drug dealers on the north shore. Two officers had been wounded and one suspect killed. It had been a high-stress day.

Then the call had come over his car radio.

"Get back here wiki-wiki, Steve," Duke had said breathlessly. "The President wants you in the Oval Office at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow."

The last time McGarrett had been summoned to the White House had been by Bobby Kennedy for the Cuban Missile Crisis, so he expected the worst. With his siren blaring, he made it to the airport just in time to catch the red-eye to New York where he would catch the shuttle to D.C. Jenny met him at the gate with his travel bag and

briefcase.

Now, safe from flying bullets, McGarrett felt the tension ease slowly out of his aching body. The plane vibrated softly as it taxied to the runway, lulling him to his first sleep in forty-eight hours. Not even the roar of take-off could wake him.

Several hours later he awoke, disoriented for a moment by the unexpected surroundings. When he remembered where he was and where he was going, he stretched, yawned, and caught the eye of the stewardess he had been admiring earlier.

She smiled a smile that was half-professional and half-seductress. She walked to his row, leaned over the empty aisle seat next to him and whispered, "Hello, sleepyhead. I was starting to worry about you."

He smiled back, feeling just a little guilty for what he was thinking. He patted the empty seat, inviting her to sit with him. She looked around for a moment before slipping into the seat. Now that she was close, McGarrett could smell the faint fragrance of Lily of the Valley, his favorite perfume. He resisted the urge to touch her.

"You were worrying about me?" he asked in his most innocent voice. He could feel the electricity between them and wondered whether she felt it too.

"You slept through dinner. I didn't have the heart to wake you." She shifted sideways in her seat and let her arm brush against him. She felt it, too.

"What's your name, honey?" he asked.

"Leah. Leah Masters." Her accent was soft, but distinctly southern. Not the good-old-boy Alabama accent, but the soft, sexy drawl of the Blue Ridge Mountains. "You?" she asked.

"Steve McGarrett," he answered quickly. "Are you based in Honolulu?"

"I wish!" She laughed softly, making her even more enticing. "I fly out of New York."

"I live in Honolulu," he said, very disappointed that she didn't, too.

"I work the red-eye to Honolulu twice a month," she said encouragingly.

A soft beep from several rows back broke the spell. Another passenger had rung for a stewardess. She smiled, and, without a word, was gone.

McGarrett sighed and opened his briefcase, expecting to find some files he could work on during the flight. Jenny knew how much he hated to waste time flying. Instead of files, though, he was surprised to find a copy of the latest Hilary Waugh mystery with a note attached: "Take a vacation! Jenny."

He tried to read but his heart just wasn't in it. Why had the President summoned him? Was there a crisis? The new President had just been inaugurated a few weeks ago; what could he want with the head of Hawaii Five-0?

McGarrett could still remember the first time he had seen Jimmy Carter. It was late August, 1945. McGarrett was a plebe at the United States Naval Academy. He had survived plebe summer and was looking forward to his first academic year. The rest of the upperclassmen had returned from their summer cruises and the plebes were having their first meal with the entire Brigade of Midshipmen assembled. Classes would start tomorrow.

"Mr. McGarrett," the blond-headed First Classman with the toothy grin said in a soft Georgia drawl, "is that the way your momma taught you to sit at the dinnuh table?"

Seventeen-year-old Steve McGarrett froze at the sound of his name. He had almost made it through his first meal unmolested by any of the upperclassmen at his table. He wondered what he had done to catch this Firstie's eye. He put down his fork, swallowed a mouthful of mashed potatoes in one gulp, and suppressed the panic that threatened to overwhelm him.

"Sir, no sir," he said sharply, wishing he could point out that no mother would make her son sit on the front four inches of his chair with his back as straight as an iron rod.

"Then why, Mr. McGarrett," the Firstie continued, "do you insult me by slouchin' at my table?"

"Sir, I--"

"Answer Mr. Carter," a Third Classman snapped--eager to use his new power--when McGarrett didn't answer fast enough to please him.

Oh, great, McGarrett thought. _Now a Youngster's got me in his sights, too._ Youngsters--Mids back for their sophomore year--were notorious hazers.

"Sir, no excuse, sir," McGarrett said quickly.

"Then sit up straight, Mr. McGarrett," Carter said. "Show some respect for your superiors."

McGarrett tried to do as he was told, though he didn't know how he could possibly sit any straighter than he already was. Whatever he did must have satisfied Carter though, because he nodded his approval and returned to eating his dinner. McGarrett was relieved to have escaped his first encounter with a returning Firstie so easily.

"They really must be scraping the bottom of the barrel because of the war, Jimmy," another Firstie said, just loud enough to be sure McGarrett and the other plebes heard. "How in the world did these boys ever get appointed?"

"I don't know, Frank," Carter said, shaking his head ruefully. "I just don't know." He turned to McGarrett again. "Tell me, Mr. McGarrett, just which Congressman nominated you to the

Academy?"

McGarrett cringed, not happy to be back at the center of attention again.

"Sir, I was not nominated by a Congressman. I have a Presidential nomination, sir."

Now he had the attention of all the upperclassmen at the table. Presidential nominations were relatively rare.

"Presidential?" Carter said, turning his full attention to the plebe. "How did you rate that, Mr. McGarrett?"

"Sir, my father was awarded the Medal of Honor during the first world war, sir."

Carter nodded, impressed. "Your father was, I take it, Mr. McGarrett, a Navy man."

"Sir, no, sir. He was an infantryman."

Carter shifted in his chair to face McGarrett, ready to move in for the kill. "Gentlemen," he said to the rest of the table, "we have an Army brat among us. Tell us, Mr. McGarrett, why didn't you choose West Point?"

Even at seventeen, Steve McGarrett knew better than to tell his real reason for choosing Annapolis over West Point: he hated marching. "Sir, because the Navy is the superior service, sir," he said, confident that answer would get him off the hook.

"Well put, Mr. McGarrett," Carter said. "As an Army brat you must know quite a few marching songs. Sing one for us."

"Sir?" McGarrett froze. Sing? He couldn't sing.

"Get up on your chair, McGarrett. Sing us a marching song."

In a daze, McGarrett stood, pulled out his chair and climbed up on the seat. He could see some of the mids at other tables looking to see what was going on. It wasn't unusual for plebes to take to song at meal time, but this would be the first time this year. He stood there in silence for a moment, feeling his face turning crimson and the sweat starting to break out on his forehead.

"Well, go on," Carter said. "Surely you know at least one marching song."

"Sir, yes, sir," McGarrett croaked, frantically trying to remember a song. Then one came to him, one his grandfather used to sing to him. He summoned up all his courage and started singing in a clear baritone voice:

_Bring the good old bugle, boys! We'll sing another song.
> Sing it with a spirit that will start the world along.
 Sing it
as we used to sing it, fifty thousand strong,
> While we were marching through Georgia.

He was starting to feel more confident now and launched lustily into

the chorus.

_Hurrah! Hurrah! We bring the Jubilee!

> Hurrah! Hurrah! The flag that makes you free.
 So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea,

> While we were marching through Georgia.

He stopped, not sure whether he should continue to the next verse. Suddenly, with a cold, clammy feeling, he realized that the entire mess hall had gone dead silent. He looked around and saw every upperclassman in the brigade was staring at him expectantly, some with wide grins on their faces. Finally he turned to Carter, who glared at him with a homicidal look.

"Coffee, Mr. McGarrett?"

McGarrett jumped in his seat, startled by the stewardess's voice and almost knocking the mug of hot coffee out of her hand. He could feel himself blushing; he wasn't used to being caught daydreaming.

"Thank you," he said, taking the coffee. He struggled to separate himself from the images from the past, but he could still feel Carter's rage as the Firstie had stood just inches from him, calling him every name in the book. After a moment, and several gulps of coffee, he calmed down and could actually smile at the memory.

He had learned later that night--after bracing against the wall in Carter's room for over an hour while the Firstie raved at him--that he had stumbled innocently onto the normally cool Firstie's one weak spot. As a plebe, Carter had been ordered by a Firstie to sing "Marching Through Georgia," a song that was anathema in the south as it celebrated Sherman's march to the sea, through Georgia. Plebe Carter had refused and the entire senior class had hazed him mercilessly for a year, trying to force him to resign. Carter took it--every bit of it--displaying an inner strength that amazed even the first classmen.

And now McGarrett had unsuspectingly thrown that song in Carter's face. Carter was on McGarrett's back his entire plebe year. McGarrett did push-ups till his shoulders were numb, he ran laps until his legs were rubber, he shined Carter's shoes, ran his errands, and memorized and sang every verse of "Dixie" until he was hoarse. Carter's constant attention to the plebe had kept other Firsties off his back; he suspected some of them even felt sorry for him.

By December, though, a curious thing had happened. Carter's attention turned paternal. To all outward appearances Carter was riding McGarrett hard. But soon, they started running together--Carter was a cross-country runner--and, when McGarrett's calculus grades started to slip, Carter tutored him. Carter couldn't stand for "his plebe" to do poorly academically, so his hazing--if it could still be called that--turned from the physical to the mental. Carter supervised McGarrett's study that first year, with the result that McGarrett ranked fourth in his class, not bad for a public school graduate with a B average.

McGarrett had heard from Carter a few times during the next few years. He sent postcards occasionally, and stopped by Mother B to visit once when he was in the area. But McGarrett never saw him again after he graduated until 1974 when he attended a law enforcement

conference in Atlanta. As Governor of Georgia, Carter had been keynote speaker and McGarrett had talked to him for a few minutes afterward.

And that was the last he had heard from Jimmy Carter, until this urgent summons to the White House.

By the time the plane landed in New York, McGarrett had finished the Hilary Waugh novel. He found most mysteries unfulfilling, and this one had been no exception. It was hard for him to be too enthused when he could deduce the murderer's identity two hundred pages ahead of the fictional detective. As he left the plane, though, Leah slipped him something to be enthused about: a piece of paper with her New York phone number and the imperative "call me."

The next few hours passed quickly as he took the shuttle to D.C., and a limousine to the White House. He was in the President's outer office only a few minutes when the door opened and the President came out to meet him, his hand outstretched and his smile as toothy as ever.

"Steve," the President said softly. "I'm mighty happy you could come. You must be exhausted after your flight."

"Nothing I'm not used to, Mr. President," McGarrett said, feeling Carter's genuine pleasure at seeing him.

The Oval Office hadn't changed much since McGarrett's last visit, nor, for that matter, had Jimmy Carter changed much in thirty years. His face was a little more worn, of course, but the smile was just as broad and sincere, and the blue eyes still had the sparkle. McGarrett still had trouble relaxing in Carter's presence; he had to resist the urge to sit at attention.

They chatted for a few minutes about their Academy days before Carter got down to business, but when he did, it fell like a bombshell on McGarrett.

"I want to appoint you to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Steve," he said softly.

"Mr. President," McGarrett stammered, "I . . . I'm just a state cop. I--"

Carter leveled his gaze on McGarrett, seemingly amused at his hesitancy. He removed a thick red folder stamped with large black letters reading "TOP SECRET" from a portfolio which lay on the sofa beside him. "It wasn't easy, even for me," he said with a wry smile, "to get your complete record. Jonathan Kaye's got it buried pretty deep."

So Jonathan has something to do with this, McGarrett thought. He waited for Carter to continue.

"He hemmed and hawed about giving it to me," Carter said, putting the file back in the portfolio, "but when I told him why I wanted it he had it on my desk within the hour." Carter waited for a reaction. When none came, he continued. "I know you transferred from Naval Intelligence to the C.I.A. when you took the job at Five-0."

"Mr. President--"

"And I know you're still an active agent for the C.I.A."

"Mr. President, I--"

"You're highly thought of in the intelligence community, Steve," Carter interrupted, "but most important of all, I know I can trust you to prevent the kind of abuse of power the C.I.A. engaged in under previous administrations. And you're an insider, so you'll be accepted by the rank-and-file."

Neither man spoke for a full thirty seconds. Finally, McGarrett found his voice again.

"Mr. President," he said softly, "I'm flattered--hell, I'm stunned--by your offer. And, although I took the Five-0 directorship as a cover for C.I.A. operations, it means much more than that to me now. I believe my first obligation is to the governor and people of Hawaii."

"I need someone I can trust absolutely, Steve," Carter said. "Everything I know tells me you're that man. I want my presidency to be remembered as ethical and honorable. To accomplish that, I need to surround myself with men like you."

"I'm sorry, Mr. President."

"Will you at least think about it, Steve?" Carter said, sighing, knowing that once McGarrett had made up his mind, not even an act of Congress could budge him.

"I'll think about it, sir, but I think you know the answer." McGarrett smiled. "Besides, sir, I'd have to be nuts to give up living in Hawaii to move to Washington."

"Well, you have me there, Steve," Carter said, chuckling. He rose, signaling that the meeting was over. He walked McGarrett to the door and they shook hands.

When the door to the Oval Office closed behind him, McGarrett stood for a moment, almost unable to move. He exhaled, feeling as though he had been holding his breath for the last five minutes. _What a day!_ he thought. After a moment, he realized the President's secretary was looking at him curiously. He smiled and asked if there was a phone he could use to make a long distance call. She directed him to an empty conference room and left.

McGarrett stood for a moment, not quite sure what he wanted to do. He was exhausted from lack of sleep and jet lag. he could get a hotel in D.C. for the night and then head back to Hawaii in the morning. Or he could head back now and sleep on the plane. Or . . .

He reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew the little piece of paper. "Call me!" it ordered. He smiled, remembering Jenny's command to "take a vacation." _A few days in New York wouldn't hurt,_ he decided. He picked up the phone to call Leah Masters.

Nope, a few days in New York won't hurt at all.

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